

## EXTENSION'S JOB WITH MIGRANTS AND EMPLOYERS OF MIGRANTS

by  
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RESERVE  
The more one is inclined to think about Extension's job with migrants and employers of migrants the more he becomes convinced of the fact that the Extension Service has the same responsibility to all farm labor as it has to all other elements of the agricultural economy. I would like to request one thing before making any statement regarding Extension's responsibilities, and that is to ask your indulgence in any seeming criticism which may come out in my talk. Personally, I know of no service or organization with which I would rather be connected than the Agricultural Extension Service. It is because of this high regard which I have for the Service that I am making what I consider frank statements in the hope that we will become more conscious of a responsibility I feel the Extension Service has failed to acknowledge in the years which have gone by. I feel just like the wife who criticizes her husband. She does it because she loves him. Consequently, if I say anything critical about the Extension Service, it is because of my high regard for the Service.

There is one thing which it seems all will admit. This is, very few of us are trained for service in the field of farm labor. Most of us knew nothing about farm labor and its problems when in 1943 Congress gave us this responsibility by enactment of a special law. As we have gone on in this work and have tried to proceed according to regular Extension methods, by meeting the problems as they presented themselves, many of us have come to realize we have just been authorized and had money provided to do a job which in reality we should have been thinking about and doing something about before the law was ever enacted.

No one will argue that the farm laborer is not a part of the agricultural economy. Yet, we have for years both with the county agents, home demonstration agents and specialists done everything to help the farmer and his family in the field of better crop production, better livestock management, pasture improvement, 4-H Club work, child care, nutrition and all other forms of Extension work. Yet, insofar as trying to do something directly to help the farm laborer and his family, we have been a perfect "dud." It takes an emergency sometimes to make us see things we have never seen before. It is too bad that it took a terrible war and the enactment of legislation to make the Extension Service conscious of the fact that they had overlooked a responsibility to the farm laborer and his family in the years which have passed.

Instead of being a job of placement, or as the Law states, of recruitment, training, and placement, this all resolves itself into nothing more than a job of education. When the farmer is made conscious of the fact that he has certain responsibilities to the laborer, and the laborer is taught that he has certain responsibilities to the producer, and they understand one another's position, and are appreciative of each other, they will need no agency to do the placement work. When the farmer learns to plan his labor needs properly; when the farmer learns the necessity of having a decent place for the laborer

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and his family to live; when he makes it possible for that laborer and his family to be part of that community the same as he is, then, a better class of laborers will be available and the farmer will not be worried about looking for labor. They will come to him. When the laborer learns he must be worthy of the wage he receives; when he respects the facilities made available for him by the farmer; when he makes himself more proficient in the handling of livestock, the tillage of crops and the care of machinery; then, he will be worth more to the farmer and the farmer will be able to pay him a better wage. He will then learn to have confidence in and respect for himself and will be in a better position to enter into the community life. No labor union will be able to get that kind of a laborer into an organization. It will not be necessary.

Just as it is the job of the Extension Service to teach terracing, better livestock management, pasture improvement and better tillage to the farmer through educational methods and by demonstrations; so it is the responsibility of the Extension Service to educate the farmer and the farm laborer to bring about the proper understanding so that both will benefit. Farmers do not terrace their land for posterity nearly so much as for the added money which they hope to make from better soil management. When the Extension Service can show a farmer through demonstrations that taking care of the laborer properly will mean more money to him and will offer a more contented farm life, he will be interested. This is an educational job. This is a job that is done not only with the farmers and the laborers, but is done by taking the entire community with you just as you try to take the community with you in a terracing or any other kind of better land use demonstration.

You may ask the question, "How will this job be done? Where would you start?" This would depend entirely upon who you were dealing with. I presume there is much difference between the migrants who travel up and down the East Coast and those who travel along the West Coast. Our farm labor program in Texas deals with the Negro phase, the labor-saving device phase, and the sheep-shearing and combine phases, but insofar as migratory labor is concerned we are familiar only with the Latin Americans. Even within our own State each phase of the program has to be attacked in a different manner and we cannot write out specific methods of procedure in handling these cases. We must do the job just as we do any other kind of Extension job. If you would permit me to be critical of the agricultural colleges who train the men who are later to become Extension personnel, I would say that while they have made a good job of teaching the science of agriculture, they have failed woefully in giving men the specific training which they need to become good county agricultural agents. There is a psychology in county agent work which is very necessary, but I know that our State college is not teaching prospective Extension workers the psychology necessary to make good county agents. Those who have made good just happen to have it.

Regardless of what practice research has found to be beneficial in the agricultural field, it is of no benefit until the farmer uses it. The farmer will not use it of his own accord. If he did, we could send him a bulletin and save the taxpayers the expense incurred by the Agricultural Extension Service. Someone must have the ability to get to the farmer and in some way get him to apply it to the soil before the research is worth anything. So it is in the field of farm labor, which is strictly another Extension educational job. There is nothing



written in the book to tell us how to do it. I believe, however, and have confidence that the Extension Service men and women will find a way to do the job.

With your permission, I would like to mention how we handle that part in Texas. Our migrants are mostly Latin Americans, one out of every six persons in Texas is of Latin-American descent. We have a migratory group in Texas of about 120,000. From 60 to 80 thousand of those migrate within the State. From 40 to 60 thousand migrate to other States. These migrants have not had much formal schooling, as a rule, because of their low standard of living. The fact that they speak Spanish has made it harder for them to start their children in school on the same basis with the Anglo-American children. Consequently, the laborer is not very highly educated.

These Latin-American migrants are peculiar people. If they do not understand you, you will have a hard time getting them to do what you ask of them. But, if you can once win their confidence and they know you are honest and truthful, they are the most loyal people in the world. When we started this work in Texas, we found they did not listen to us at all. In our program we have been working entirely with but one idea in mind, so far as the Latin American is concerned, and that is to win his confidence. This we are attempting to do by employing men who know the Latin American, know his habits and customs and can speak his language. These men must be honest, truthful, and must have an attitude of fairness both to the laborer and the farmer. Many of these men who are working for us and who are doing a wonderful job in this particular field have never gone very far in grade school, although a few of the men whom we have employed recently are college men. These men are getting the job done by contacting the laborers in their homes and in the fields and doing everything possible to win their confidence. The point I am trying to bring out is that whatever job must be done or whatever problem solved, it takes common sense and not a hell of a lot of economics to figure out what needs to be done. These men are doing the job.

On the other hand we have the educational job with the farmers who must learn to recognize the laborers' problems. This educational job is done by the county agent through his farm labor advisory committee which is composed of farmers and every type of business man in the community, as well as the ministers of all churches. Most people are honest and will do the right thing when they find out the truth. Farmers and city people who had failed to provide shelters and stopping places for these migrants in the cities and towns have not built 62 reception centers in Texas. At these centers the migrants can stop to spend the night, cook, clean up, bathe, wash their clothes and be contacted by a representative of the Extension Service, who is stationed at each of these centers during migration.

The result is that the laborer is better satisfied, the farmer gets better service, a placement does not become the problem because the farmer and the laborer have an opportunity to get together on understanding terms. The whole story is one of education and since this is an educational organization with a phase of work which comes in the agricultural field, the Extension Service should assume its responsibility whether there is a law enacted for that purpose or not.



When I was a student at Texas A & M College, I took my master's degree in soils. This was in 1914. That institution did not teach me anything about soil conservation 35 years ago while millions of dollars worth of rich plant food was washing away in our own State. This was our State agricultural institution. They needed to hang their heads in shame for what in the courts would be called criminal negligence. Because of my definite interest in the Extension Service I hope that those who are in administrative charge will rise to the occasion and assume the Extension responsibilities with respect to farm labor so as the years progress our Extension Services will not have to hang their heads in shame because of what they failed to do in the field of farm labor.